

## LICENSE PLATE HISTORY

- 1905 The Division of Motor Vehicles created by the Legislature and placed under the direction of the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State signed all licenses personally. There was a flat fee of \$2 charged on a yearly basis, and then a license number was assigned. The owner was responsible for making his own "plate". It could be made of wood, metal, or leather, with the numbering painted or fastened on.

This plate had to be carried on the vehicle. If the owner did not wish to have a plate, they could stencil the number on the front and rear of the vehicle itself. There were no plates issued by the Division of Motor Vehicles. The first vehicle licensed belonged to Mr. S.A. Perkins of Tacoma. On May 2, 1905, he licensed a 30 HP Pope-Toledo Touring car. Mr. Perkins retained his license number B-1 for many years. During the first year, 763 license numbers were issued resulting in revenue of \$ 1,526.

- 1906 During this year, the total number of licenses increased to 1,253.

- 1910 In 1910, the total number of vehicles had risen to 9,311.

- 1915 Legislature changed the license laws completely, requiring an application filed with a county auditor. A temporary plate was furnished for use while waiting for plates to be mailed from Olympia.

Since 1910 the rate of increase expanded, and by the year 1915, it had increased to 46,000 vehicles.

From 1915 to 1916, Tacoma Rubber and Stamp Company made license plates out of wood or leather.

- 1916 Plates from 1916 through 1920 were issued on a March-to-March basis. The year on the plate indicated the year of expiration.

During this year, the Division of Motor Vehicles, under the direction of the Secretary of State, issued the first metal license plates. They were made with a blue background and white letters. Passenger vehicles were designated by a small "X", trucks by a "T", and publicly owned vehicles by a small "E". License plates were issued to the individual and were transferred from vehicle to vehicle. Throughout the years, the colors of the plates have changed (see attached list).

- 1917 From 1917 to 1920, Tacoma Rubber and Stamp made license plates from Porcelain.

- 1921 By 1921, the number of registrations had reached 137,000 vehicles and produced revenue in the amount of \$2,841,000. At this time, the Legislature also changed the date of expiration to December 31, which required that another license plate having a different date of expiration be ordered. When these license plates arrived, they were stored with the other license plates in the basement of the Capitol Building.

The weight of the license plates was so great that the floor of the building began to sink. The sinking of the basement floor necessitated the license plates being transferred to another part of the building during a weekend.

- 1921 Legislature established the Administrative Code, which set up the Department of Licenses and created the position of Director of Licenses.
- 1923 In 1923, manufacture of license plates began in the penitentiary at Walla Walla. This produced a considerable cost savings. The same colors were used for plates manufactured in 1923, 1924, and 1925. This resulted in cost savings through purchasing the enamel to paint the license plates in large quantities."
- 1926 A new license design was instituted this year. The design was slightly larger than previous license plates and had the word "Washington" stamped in full across the bottom of the plate. These changes resulted from letters received from Washington vehicle owners.

*The following are two examples of the letters that were received:*

- A great many Washington automobiles travel into other states during the course of the year and if the name is brought to the attention of the people in those states, it will be a very suggestive form of advertising. It will also be a wonderful help in selling the state to our own people. Using the abbreviation is more or less like calling a man by a nickname and does not carry the dignity, which the name of the state should have.
  - The tourist travel to the East is getting larger every year and a license bearing the name "WASHINGTON" would be much more effective from an advertising standpoint than the abbreviated form "WN".
- 1934 Before 1934, all motor vehicle license plates were mailed from Olympia. In 1934, the system was changed and license plates were assigned to the counties. A system of assigning county letters to the plate number was adopted. This system was discontinued in 1979. The use of county temporary license plates was abandoned. Registrations in 1934 had increased to 460,000.
- 1937 Legislation delegates authority to the Director to appoint subagents.
- 1939 A "Golden Jubilee" 50th anniversary license plate was issued.
- 1943 In 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1948 and 1952 windshield stickers were used in lieu of license plates. The use of the windshield stickers was because aluminum was not available during the war years.
- 1949 Disabled American Veteran plates implemented. (Exempt from fees for one vehicle)
- 1953 Data processing converted to a punch card system allowing for "prebills".
- 1955 Horseless Carriage license plates implemented.
- 1957 Amateur Radio Operator (HAM) license plates implemented.
- 1958 A new type of license plate was issued. The new plates used a combination of three letters and three numbers.
- 1963 Due to a misunderstanding in the specifications for the new 1963 license plates, there was no space provided for the validation tabs, so "WASHINGTON" was abbreviated to

"WASH". This caused a storm of protests from citizens and the legislature.

- 1965 Department of Motor Vehicles created.
- 1965 The 1965 Legislature passed a law prohibiting the use of the abbreviation "WASH" on vehicle license plates.
- 1968 A 1968 law required that all new license plates be manufactured using reflectorized material. This was to allow easier identification of license plates in the dark.
- 1973 Personalized Plates voted in by referendum. Revenue dedicated to the support efforts to protect wildlife species (Wild Life Account).
- 1975 Amateur Radio Operator (HAM) implemented.
- 1975 Personalized Plates, or Vanity Plates were authorized by the legislature and were made available to the public. These plates could contain between 2 to 7 numbers or letters in any combination that did not conflict with existing plates.
- 1977 Department of Motor Vehicles name changed to Department of Licensing.
- 1979 Disabled Persons Parking and Medal of Honor (exempt from fees for one vehicle) implemented.
- 1980 Disabled American Veteran (exempt from fees for one vehicle) implemented.
- 1982 Former Prisoner of War (exempt from fees for one vehicle) implemented.
- 1983 Legislation requiring plate replacement for vehicle license plates five years of older and vehicle license plates issued on or before January 1, 1968.
- 1986 The legislature passed a bill mandating the Department of Licensing to design a new license plate in recognition of Washington State's Centennial.  
  
Washington residents turned in 1,300 designs. A panel selected 12 designs out of the 1300. The Governor and the Director of the Department of Licensing then selected the final design.  
  
The winner of the design contest was Eric Booth, an 18-year-old high school student. The legislature also authorized use of single letters or numbers on personalized license plates this year.  
  
Plate replacement legislation is repealed due to public outcry.
- 1987 Pearl Harbor Survivor plates implemented and surviving spouses of POW's exempted from fees for one vehicle. In addition, starting on January 1, 1987, license plates representing Washington's centennial were issued. These plates have a blue color scheme on a white background with ""Washington"" and "Centennial Celebration" in red. A rendition of Mount Rainier is in the background.

1988 Vanpool (excise, sales, and use tax exempt) before 1988 was exempt tabs.

Legislature requested DOL to conduct a study of specialty plate programs. (Specialized Motor Vehicle License Plates attached for reference.)

1990 Legislature passed a bill giving DOL the "sole discretion" to determine whether or not to create, design, or issue a special plate. The line "Centennial Celebration" was dropped from the license plate; otherwise, the license plates remained the same. Legislation this year has allowed veterans to display a U.S. flag and campaign ribbons on the bottom of the license plate.

1991 Purple Heart, Military Affiliate Radio System (MARS), Collector Vehicle, and Square Dancer approved by DOL.

1993 Firefighter (approved, issuance planned to be in early 1994, but never released.)

1994 The legislature passed the collegiate plate bill, which allows the six major public universities to raise funds for scholarships. These plates began to be issued in 1995. This program is similar to the personalized plate series however; all funds go directly to the universities.

Presently, all of the six universities have designed their plate and are raising money for their scholarship funds; Washington State University (WSU) starting July 3, 1995, University of Washington (UofW) starting July 3, 1995, Western Washington University (WWU) starting March 1, 1996, Eastern Washington University (EWU) starting March 1, 1996, Central Washington University (CWU) starting November 12, 1996, and The Evergreen State College (TESC) starting July 1997.

1995 Stadium license plate approved by Legislature. Additional revenue to pay for the construction bonds for the baseball stadium. Became available July 1996.

1996 LTC working group proposes legislation that removes DOL's authority to approve new special plates. Legislation passes in 1997.

1997 The legislature passed Substitute House Bill (SHB) 1008, Standardizing License Plates. This bill requires all license plates be issued on a standard background beginning with registrations due or to become due January 2001. Exceptions to this section are Horseless Carriage and Collector Vehicle license plates issued before January 1, 1981, the Medal of Honor plates, and plates issued to commercial vehicles with a gross weight of more than 26,000 pounds. The mountain background will remain as the standard design and the words "Evergreen State" has been added to the bottom of the plate.

1998 New special license plate fees with an effective date of 1/1/98. The original issue fees for special plates are set at \$40.00 with \$12.00 earmarked for DOL's administrative costs.

1999 Effective 1/1/99, special plate renewals are set at \$30.00, with \$2.00 earmarked for DOL.

2001 All license plates issued on a standard background, (except MOH and collector vehicle plates issued prior to 1/1/87), as designated by DOL.

2002 DOL conducts an internal study on implementing "flat plate" technology.

Cooper Jones Emblems implemented September 3. Purchase of emblems only available through Department of Printings store or their website. Program substantially funded through a donation from the Cooper Jones Foundation.

2003 Legislation creates the Special License Plate Review Board, implementation July 1, 2003.

2004 The SLPRB reviews and approves three application packets for the creation of three new special plates. Washington State Law Enforcement Memorial, Helping Kids Speak, and the Professional Fire Fighters and Paramedics. All three plates later get approval through the Legislative process.

Legislature approves three new special plates; Helping Kids Speak, Washington State Law Enforcement Memorial, and Professional Fire Fighters and Paramedics plates.

Helping Kids Speak plate, approved for implementation on 11/1/2004. This is the first new special plate created and issued since 1998.

The department starts to work on implementing a digital plate system, funded through the 2004 supplemental budget.

Special license plate disabled parking emblem implemented effective November 1, 2004.

2005 Washington State Law Enforcement Memorial and the Professional Fire Fighters plates will be released effective 1/1/2005.

#### WASHINGTON PASSENGER LICENSE PLATE COLORS

##### **1916 - 1921**

White on blue, white on lavender, white on black, black on yellow and black on yellow with black on white metal tabs, white on green (3-20 to 3-21)\*, black on grey (3-21 to 12-21)\*.

*\*Plates from 1916 through 1920 were issued on a March-to-March basis. The year on the plate indicated the year of expiration.*

##### **1922 - 1952**

"White on brown, blue on white, white on blue, blue on white, white on green, green on white, black on orange, white on green, green on white, white on green, green on white, white on green, green on white, white on blue, blue on white, white on blue, green on white, yellow on green, green on white, white on green, green on white windshield sticker windshield sticker

green on white windshield sticker green on aluminum windshield sticker green on gray green on white metal tabs, green on aluminum windshield sticker.

### **1953 – Present**

Metal-tabs, green reflective material white on green metal tabs, red on aluminum metal tabs, green on white metal tabs, white on green white on green validating tabs, green on silver scotchlite validating tabs, aluminum on green validating tabs, green on aluminum validating "tabs, silver on green scotchlite general issue green on white plates red, white and blue.

*Note: If a license plate was not issued in a particular year, use the earlier preceding plate year.  
Example 1943 or 1944 should be issued a 1942 plate.*